

Alice's Evidence

by Lewis Carroll *from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Lewis Carroll's delightful story Alice's Adventures in Wonderland tells of an English girl named Alice who explores a strange world. In this passage, Alice has been attending a trial of the Knave of Hearts who is accused of stealing the Queen's tarts. Just as Alice is called as a witness, she suddenly begins to grow quite large.

'Here!' cried Alice, quite forgetting in the flurry of the moment how large she had grown in the last few minutes, and she jumped up in such a hurry that she tipped over the jury-box with the edge of her skirt, upsetting all the jurymen on to the heads of the crowd below, and there they lay sprawling about, reminding her very much of a globe of goldfish she had accidentally upset the week before.

'Oh, I beg your pardon!' she exclaimed in a tone of great dismay, and began picking them up again as quickly as she could, for the accident of the goldfish kept running in her head, and she had a vague sort of idea that they must be collected at once and put back into the jury-box, or they would die.

'The trial cannot proceed,' said the King in a very grave voice, 'until all the jurymen are back in their proper places-- all,' he repeated with great emphasis, looking hard at Alice as he said so.

Alice looked at the jury-box, and saw that, in her haste, she had put the Lizard in head downwards, and the poor little thing was waving its tail about in a melancholy way, being quite unable to move. She soon got it out again, and put it right; 'not that it signifies much,' she said to herself; 'I should think it would be quite as much use in the trial one way up as the other.'

As soon as the jury had a little recovered from the shock of being upset, and their slates and pencils had been found and handed back to them, they set to work very diligently to write out a history of the accident, all except the Lizard, who seemed too much overcome to do anything but sit with its mouth open, gazing up into the roof of the court.

'What do you know about this business?' the King said to Alice.

'Nothing,' said Alice.

'Nothing whatever?' persisted the King.

'Nothing whatever,' said Alice.

'That's very important,' the King said, turning to the jury. They were just beginning to write this down on their slates, when the White Rabbit interrupted: 'Unimportant, your Majesty means, of course,' he

said in a very respectful tone, but frowning and making faces at him as he spoke.

'Unimportant, of course, I meant,' the King hastily said, and went on to himself in an undertone, 'important--unimportant-- unimportant--important--' as if he were trying which word sounded best.

Some of the jury wrote it down 'important,' and some 'unimportant.' Alice could see this, as she was near enough to look over their slates; 'but it doesn't matter a bit,' she thought to herself.

At this moment the King, who had been for some time busily writing in his note-book, cackled out 'Silence!' and read out from his book, 'Rule Forty-two. All persons more than a mile high to leave the court.'

Everybody looked at Alice.

'I'm not a mile high,' said Alice.

'You are,' said the King.

'Nearly two miles high,' added the Queen.

'Well, I shan't go, at any rate,' said Alice: 'besides, that's not a regular rule: you invented it just now.'

'It's the oldest rule in the book,' said the King.

'Then it ought to be Number One,' said Alice.

Questions

1. Why did the jury box tip over?
2. What was Alice reminded of when she saw the jurors lying on the crowd below?
3. Why did the King want to make Alice leave the courtroom?
4. Why should "the oldest rule in the book" be "Number One" and Rule Forty-Two?